

A CHAPTER ON HORSES.

BY H. MILNOR CLAPP.

Of all four-footed brutes, over whom God has given man dominion, the condition of none is so superlatively wretched as that of the horse. A slave from the hour of his birth, in Christian climes, he is early taught to tremble at his master's voice, and as soon as his form begins to develop itself, his toils, his stripes, his privations begin. In the country, indeed, where policy teaches the man to take care of the brute, the situation of the latter is comparatively comfortable to that of his co-laborer in town. Just imagine, for a moment, that the numerous droves which are annually brought to the cities, could, upon the way, by miraculous agency, be made to comprehend the fate that awaits them in our streets, what a general stampede would instantly take place! The race of the Last of the Mammoths would be nothing in comparison; and if

there should still exist, in the farthest limits of our late conquests, any fertile pastures yet unvisited by man, be sure that these elysiums of rest would be the fugitives' first abiding-place. Here and there, a pair of sleek nags, intended for some philanthropic gentleman's carriage—perhaps the President or Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Cruelty to Animals—might be content to stand still on the road, weighing the prospect of ample feed and comfortable stabling, against long family-drives on a warm day, the abuse of deceitful grooms, or the hard hands into which their old age is to be consigned. But hacks of every order, from the omnibus and the livery stable, to the poor cart-drudge, would desperately fly the vision. If anything could add wings to the doctor's horse, it must be the odor of those horrid compounds which are to be forced down the poor creature's throat, upon the least symptom of a cough, or sign of flagging, since it is notorious that gentlemen of a profession, perhaps the best-informed in the community, are the very worst judges of horse-flesh, whether in condition, or out of it. The lawyer would, I think, fare better; inasmuch, as it is fair to infer, that some of the easy pickings of clients would, doubtless, fall on the ribs of his nag. The soldier would, of course, be compelled to fight solely on foot, for the dragoon would be dismounted, and the artillery drawn to battle by the legitimate objects of the instrument of death. The reverend clergy—despite the old fling at them, which is rank scandal—would be horsed and mounted like Mamelukes. Charcoal-men—offences of old date not being brought into the question—might, here and there, obtain a coley, but the fellows who hunt hickory-ashes, and the wretches who go about for slops, would be deservedly left in the lurch. The very scent of the villainous receptacles would turn the stomachs and tails of a thousand horses.

But it is, after all, the poor cart-horse, in all the varieties of his labors, which is worst treated in every particular. Why, even the sailor, who has little time to note abuses on shore, hardly used as he is on the rolling billow, has added his testimony to this fact, while humorously complaining, in doggerel verse, of his tough fare on shipboard.

"Old horse!" says the rhyme, apostrophizing a remarkably suspicious-looking piece of salt junk:

"Old horse! old horse! what brought you here?"

The miserable remains of poor Dobbin, thus conjured, is supposed to answer pathetically:

"From Sacarap to Portland pier,
I've carted stones for many a year,
'Till killed by blows and sore abuse,
They salted me down for sailors' use."

Mark the last two lines. Surely this is the most subtle of all evil treatment—this is, indeed, being pursued beyond the grave; to be killed by blows and sore abuse, and then salted down to feed sailors, as it were, if we are to believe the plain statements of Mr. Dana and others, that the sufferings of the old horse on dry land should be perpetuated on the seas, in the person of poor Jack. The Turks, or the Chinese, themselves, never dreamed of so ingenious a piece of barbarism. If the

reader supposes that an attempt to create a smile is intended here, I entreat him to believe that he is mistaken. I take this opportunity, also, to assure the meek and patient witness of man's barbarity, that I am not

"An ignis fatuus, rose
To make me merry with his woes."

No! no! the animal's bucket is too full already, and not mine be the drop to cause it to run over.

It is some comfort to think that, degraded and abused as he is, the condition of the cart-horse has certainly, in some degree, improved within the past ten years. The eye is not as often offended with beholding in our streets, those deplorable specimens of attenuation, vulgarly known as "perambulating skeletons"—"bags of bones," "ribs of death," or "livery stable signs"—expressions of ridicule, under cover of which, unfortunately, the rascally driver too often escapes from the populace, with unbroken bones. Indeed, it is somewhat curious, that, although the lower orders are sufficiently ready to interfere with a brute for over-loading or otherwise ill-using, in public, a poor beast, they never meddle, save by a sneer, or a humorous sarcasm, with the *right* of the former to starve the latter by slow degrees, the direst of all deaths. I would respectfully call the attention of the Marshal's police to these public exhibitions of comparative anatomy, which are not only abominations in themselves, but may be said, in some sense, to clash with the regular schools. The drivers are, invariably, well fed, lazy rascals, always to be found adding their gross weight to that under which the poor creature is staggering. They often cunningly cover the animal with a ragged blanket, or a ruined coverlet, or some apparent defensible of that kind; but a single glance directed to the beast will discover the trick, and upon lifting the deceitful veil, the appealing ribs and pointed hip-bones will invariably be found beneath.

It is pleasant to turn from this "starved subject" to an anecdote or two, illustrative of the sagacity of the horse, when he, himself, having fallen into the hands of an easy, merciful owner, sets his equine wits to work to impose upon him.

My father once possessed two excellent horses which he used daily in his business—sometimes in single, and sometimes in double harness. One of these, called Black Jack, was a most knowing nag. He was a stout, round-flanked, compactly-built fellow, a good traveller, but sorely against his will. Unluckily for his love of ease, he was matched with a swift, free-going beast. Often I have seen him put back his ears, and reach over the shaft-pole to bite the near horse, when the latter was disposed to mend his gait on a frosty day. It was his custom never to forget a house where a visit had once been paid, and when he was travelling that street, long after attendance had ceased, it was necessary to watch him closely, to prevent his sheering suddenly into the curbstone. On an easy road, where the voice at its usual pitch could reach his ears, he apparently listened to every word of the conversation, in which he would become so much interested, that, if permitted, he would gradually come to a full stop. In winter,

when the horses were chiefly used singly, on alternate days, he knew his day of rest better than the groom: and many a scuffle have I witnessed in his stall when he felt himself imposed upon in this important particular. In fact, as soon as he finished feeding in the morning, it was curious to see him watching the motions of the groom. He had a mild, intelligent eye—possessed of more expression than I remember ever to have remarked in a horse before. In this organ of his, I have certainly seen manifested at different moments of the same half-hour, expectation, satisfaction, fear, disappointment, and even fury. For instance, the man busies himself in cleaning up the stable, the eye of the horse follows his every movement; here was expectation plainly depicted in his sagacious looks and his erected ears. Next, the former approaches a horse in another manger, and lays his hand on his halter; Black Jack's ears droop at their tips, and, with a complacent roll of his clear, gray eye, he thrusts his nose down for a grain or two of corn, which had previously escaped his lips in the angles of the trough; here was satisfaction also clearly shown in his demeanor, and, in the loose, lazy way in which he held himself up in the stall. Presently the groom appears to be in doubt, and coming in front of the nags, rubs his head as he cogitates which of the three must go; Black Jack looks sideways at him in so droll a way, that the fellow laughs to himself: here was fear. At last the man makes up his mind, and taking down Jack's collar, approaches him warily, assured from his sulky look that the brute will make him feel his teeth, if he loses sight of his eye for a moment; here was disappointment which often ended in a fight, during which the animal sometimes became outrageous. At last he is subdued, harnessed, and brought out into the yard, where he stands sulkily enough, watching an opportunity to run back into his stall. However, the stable-door is now closed, and the groom is shifting himself in the carriage-house, a window of which looks on the yard. At this moment, perhaps, the kitchen-door opens, and a female servant comes out. The horse instantly shows his teeth, stamps on the bricks, and makes a great show of attacking her. She screams and retreats: he chases her the length of the yard, and out comes the groom, sending his voice before him. After this heroic explosion of spleen, Black Jack stands quiet and disconsolate enough, or else he walks to the window of the carriage-house, and looks in to see, perhaps, if the man's heart will not relent, after all. Receiving another rebuff, he returns to his former position, and hearing now the carriage-house doors open, listens intently. Catching the rumble of the vehicle descending into the alley, he puts back his ears, shakes his head viciously, and charges the dog-house to the great dissatisfaction of Carlo, who, though ready for *fun* in any shape, has no idea of having his domicile demolished. At length the groom throws open the gate, and Jack turns short round facing the upper end of the yard, as if determined not to see him.

"Come out here," cries the man, who is, perhaps, a few moments behind his time.

The horse tacitly refuses to stir.

"Do you hear there, you rascal?" says the man, equally resolute not to go after him, "come out."

But the horse is looking intently at the kitchen windows, and pays not the least regard to the invitation. The cook grins with her head out of the door; Carlo, by his drooping crest and fearful look, shows that he has doubts whether he is not, somehow, involved in the difficulty; and in the end, another race ensues up the yard, when Jack is captured and led off: the groom, grumbling out his belief, that such a horse is not to be found without the precincts of a circus wall. He was certainly made to go through the world easily, since the person in whose possession he passed in the course of time, informed me that now, at the age of twenty, he is as lazy and as full of finesse as ever.

Occasionally, the horse, though descended from a respectable stock, evinces, from the days of his colthood, a ferocious and unconquerable spirit. An acquaintance of mine, a farmer, in Montgomery county, of this State, once reared a colt, whose intractable disposition proved too much for the whole township. He passed into numerous hands, and was finally sold, for a song, to a Dutch drover. It was a peculiarity of this horse, that he never would allow a man to enter his stall, without attacking him with the utmost ferocity. Several times he put the farmer's life in imminent danger, and once, when by some artifice his neck was secured in a cow-chain, I saw him, by main force, tear the chain from its fastening, and make the whole strength of the farm flee. This horse showed a curious degree of affection to a ram, who came on the farm in company with a cow, purchased from a drove. The ram afterwards attached himself on the pastures to the colt, moved, perhaps, by certain points of resemblance in their character, for the former himself was a very Ajax, easily incited to combat, and in his rage as blind as a wall. He would assault, on provocation, or from sheer caprice, any object on the premises, from the great lord of the pastures, himself, down to a turkey-gobbler. So long as this ram was at the side of the horse, you might safely put the latter in gears, and work him, but if Brimstone—as he was called from his color, to say nothing of his character—once missed his trusty friend, in the words of the farmer, who spoke English indifferently, he was almost certain "to make pieces." The ram, on this account, as well as for his own formidable aspect, was a creature of consequence in the vicinity, and well he knew it. If the horse was to be caught in the field, Brom was to be consulted: if he was to be placed in gears, Brom must stand by the traces; if he was to be mounted, and the rider retain his seat, Brom must lend his countenance to the scene. Often have I suppressed a smile to encounter the worthy old gentleman, attired in his broad-rimmed hat and round gray coat, mounted on Brimstone's back, en route for church—the ram, who had been coaxed to the creek, and washed snow-white, the evening before, trotting alongside, with the gravity of Dean Swift, himself. But the most farcical scene of all, was to see Brimstone, with the other horses,

hitched to the threshing-machine, when a stack of rye was to be cleaned. On these occasions, Brom was first to be bribed into the ring, with a handful of corn; he was then to be seized, and hoisted upon a platform, to which he was securely strapped. Here, after a few useless interjections, he sat munching his corn, and look sagely on, while the horses passed under him in a continuous circle, until the day's operations were completed. It was remarked that he added his voice to the cries by which the horses were stopped and set in motion again, from the threshing-floor, and, when released from his post of observation, it was necessary to watch him, as he always directly offered battle to a patient little pony, running back to obtain the vantage-ground for a tilt, shaking his hard head, and bleating out his wacry, in a most ridiculous way. The farmer supposed, with reason, that Brom had, somehow, got a notion into his crooked pate, that the little Canadian, who took his part in the labor of the day, was the instigator of his elevation. Nevertheless, I am inclined to think that he singled him out because, as Sam Weller says "somebody was to be whopped," and the pony, from his diminutive size, was the fairest mark. However, upon other occasions, Brom showed no such prudent preferences, having, as I have already hinted, a heart like a lion, and a head like the anvil of Cyclops. I have more to say of Brimstone and Brom, which, however, I must defer to another chapter.